**AIC Charter**

**Introduction**

AIC, Association Internationale des Charités, (International Association of Charities) is an **INGO**.

It is **an international network** bringing together groups of Christian volunteers inspired by the charism of Saint Vincent de Paul, its founder.

**The aim of this network, mainly formed of women, is to combat forms of poverty at the local level.**

**And to involve public authorities in this fight against poverty.**

AIC groups have a two-fold legal identity:

* A civil identity as NGOs recognised in their own country.
* A canonical identity subject to canon law. Every local AIC group is, under canon law, an “association of lay people”. This means its constitution is officially “approved” by the competent ecclesiastical authority.

AIC International itself is constituted as a “juridical person”, according to Belgian law:

**er «per pour les Laïques reçu reçu du Consiel Pontifical pour les Laes**

**The Constitution** (1985) determines the way AIC works. It can be consulted on our website.

**The By-Laws** (1985) determine the principles and ethics of collaboration, and the rights and duties of members.

The **Canonical Statutes** (2007) confirm our organisation as a faithful movement of lay people.

Saint Vincent and his successors received from the Holy See, by Apostolic Privilege (C 312 § 2), permission to establish parish-based or inter-parish Confraternities of Charity. Later on, local groups were organised into national and international associations (AIC) with different names according to the countries.

AIC belongs to the Vincentian Family, formed of all the associations founded by Saint Vincent de Paul himself, or those inspired by his work. The Vincentian Family has over 2 million members around the world.

**Chapter 1:**

**AIC’s Identity**

* Our Origins
* The Motivations for our Action
* The Profile of our Volunteers
* Working as a Team
* The Organization of the AIC Network

**The Origins**

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| On 20th August 1617 in Châtillon-les-Dombes (France), Vincent de Paul, the parish priest, appealed for help for a family in need. The priest quickly realised that the overflowing generosity that resulted from his call had to be organised, to make it effective, and so he founded the first group of “Charities”.  On 8 December 1617, the bishop of Lyons, Msgr Denis Simon de Marquemont, handed to Monsieur Vincent the decree recognizing the new Association of Charity and its rule.  “Monsieur Vincent’s” choice: Evangelisation of the poor, and action on behalf of the deprived: this was the two-fold, dominating purpose of the life of Monsieur Vincent. Charity for him was the vocation to serve the most humble of people, the abandoned, those afflicted by physical and spiritual misery.  To love means to feel responsible. Thus he took every initiative he could to alleviate the miseries of the people he met.  The Charities spread, and in 1629 Saint Vincent asked Louise de Marillac to coordinate them and visit the groups. Saint Vincent realised the difficulties the ladies of Charity would meet, given the rigours of life in service of ever-increasing numbers of poor people.  In order to provide support, he joined a new company of women with Louise de Marillac, living a new Rule, outside the cloister, in the service of the poor: the Daughters of Charity. These were formed as a “Company" in 1633, led by Louise de Marillac. So "the ladies and the daughters" complemented each other in their vocation and their service, following the inspiration of their joint Founder.  After Vatican II, the international organisation was strengthened by the creation of an international association in Belgium. | **Founded in 1617 as a way of making overflowing generosity effective**  **Dual aim: evangelise and be responsible in the face of other people’s poverty.**  **The lay Ladies work side by side…**  **…with the Daughters of Charity**  **1970: Creation of AIC** |

**Questions to reflect on in groups:**

1. **AIC International is present in 53 countries and has been in existence for nearly 400 years; what does the fact you belong to this association bring you, how does this motivate you in your voluntary work?**
2. **Particular circumstances inspired Saint Vincent in the creation of the first groups of Charities, what forms of poverty invite us to pursue the mission that he has entrusted to us today?**
3. **How do we propose to change the unfair circumstances experienced by those living in poverty today?**